

Transcript for **Violence on the Job**

Risky Business (*episode 1*)

[Interviewee #1]:

I had bruises all over my body and my ribs were all bruised.

[Interviewee #2]:

At one point he was pushing, threatening, cursing at me.

[NARRATOR – Ken Strunk] Each week in the United States, an average of 33,000 workers are assaulted on the job and 17 are murdered.

[Interviewee #3]: Disastrous, a nightmare. I felt violated; I felt angry

[NARRATOR]

Homicide remains among the leading causes of workplace violence for both men and women.

[Interviewee# 4]: We had at least one death recently, and several in the past decade

[NARRATOR]

From 1993 to 1999, workplace violence accounted for 18% of all violent crime.

[Interviewee #5]: It was outrageous the amount of murders going on

[Interviewee #6]: You can't wait for incidents to occur you have got to be ahead of the curve on it.

[Interviewee #7]: Being assaulted is not part of the job.

[NARRATOR]

Hello, I'm Ken Strunk for the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health. Today violence is generally viewed as a social problem - the result of poverty, lack of education, and many other factors.

The solutions to these problems tend to be complex and require long-term interventions. Obviously, we cannot wait to address workplace violence solely as a social issue.

Because practical solutions are needed now, it must be viewed as a serious workplace hazard, just like any other threat to worker safety. Some people might think that workplace violence is just another cost of doing business or that it comes with the territory in certain jobs.

NIOSH rejects this type of thinking. Exposure to violence is never an acceptable consequence of earning a living. Injury and death on the job must be eliminated no matter the cause. So stay with us as we look at the nature of violence in today's workplace and how to protect the lives of workers at risk.

[NARRATOR]

Acts of violence are not spread evenly across all workplaces. Rather, violence tends to occur in specific work settings. More than half of all workplace homicides occur in retail or service settings such as convenience stores, taxicab services, and gas stations. Homicide is the leading cause of death in these industries. That's right. The number one cause. About three-fourths of these homicides occur during robberies. Fernando Mateo is president of the NY state federation of taxi drivers.

[MATEO]

We always believe that if you can rob someone at gunpoint the time is going to come when you're going to graduate and you're going to murder someone to take their money. And that is exactly what had happened.

[OSBORNE:]

Our security department along with operations our main goal is safety of the employees and the customers. Our biggest concern would be robbery

[NARRATOR]

Stores and service industries are particularly vulnerable to violence because they generally involve the exchange of money, working alone or in small numbers, and delivering passengers, goods, or services. They may also involve working in high-crime areas or during late night or early morning hours. All of these factors can increase the risk of violence in any workplace.

[NARRATOR]

Although the most common form of violence is crime-related, a significant number of workplace assaults occur where the aggressor has a legitimate business relationship with the victim.

[BEAGLE]

I was visiting a place of public assembly, during a routine compliance call when just out of the blue I was assaulted by a cook. I managed to extricate myself and I went running towards the front door and he told me that the door was locked and that I wouldn't be able to escape but fortunately being a diligent inspector I had them put a crash bar on a few years earlier so I was able to escape. It doesn't make any difference what size you are if somebody's irritated or agitated or mentally unbalanced they'll come after a man just as easily as they will a woman.

[NARRATOR]

In these cases, the attacker may be a client, patient, inmate, or any other individual to whom services are provided. A large proportion of these assaults happen to medical personnel and social workers. Take for example the case of Nancy Fitzgivens, a children's services worker in Franklin county Ohio. While on a home visit to check on a child in her care Nancy was stabbed to death, leaving behind her husband and three children.

[BENSON]

We have records of people everyday getting broken noses, broken jaws, broken teeth and it has become a litany of terror for folks. They want to do their jobs but they have to deal with the issue of violence in the workplace. So for public sector employees the issue of dealing with difficult clients, inmates and the mentally retarded and the mentally ill is a very serious issue.

[NARRATOR]

In health care and drug treatment facilities, nurses are often the targets of violent outbursts.

[BEDOW]

We have 27 male patients, and 3 female staff on duty. One of the patients was not allowed to go smoking that day so decided to cause some disruption. When he started to disrupt then when we went to intervene he began to attack me. Even though the other 2 staff immediately came to my aid he slammed my head into a butcher block counter 4 or five times and was punching me on my shoulder and my arm and my back uncounted times. During the attack he hit me so hard my tied shoes came off underneath the desk, and my glasses ended up about 25 feet down the hallway. The whole time he was hitting me he was saying how he was going to continue to try to kill me.

[DANGLER]

We had brought all of the patients up to the dining room. There was 1 patient that stayed back I heard him yelling and threatening another nurse that had stayed back at the nurses station. He had attempted to go over the counter. So I called to him and tried to get his attention away from her and he just bolted at me. And he just started hitting my face with his fist and at probably the third blow I went down on the floor there was one patient that had stayed back. And that patient heard pounding that was my head hitting the wall as he would punch my face. And this patient that was left back ran up the hall and jumped on this man, this man was so big he was carrying this other patient on his back. If it wasn't for this other patient there is no way I would have lived through what was coming.

[NARRATOR]

Stories like these are not uncommon. Violence in treatment settings is usually caused by clients, and occasionally their family members, who feel frustrated, vulnerable, and out of control.

And what about cases of worker-on-worker violence the kind that figure prominently in newscasts and headlines? Contrary to popular belief, worker-on-worker violence accounts for only about 8% of workplace homicides. But no industry is immune to this type of violence since it is usually motivated by interpersonal or work-related disputes.

Another type of workplace violence stems from a personal relationship between the attacker and victim. This type of violence spills over from personal life to the workplace. For example, domestic disputes in which the victim is assaulted or threatened while at work.

Laws and regulations regarding workplace violence vary by locality. There is no national legislation that specifically addresses workplace violence. OSHA, the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and NIOSH has published voluntary guidelines and recommendations for taxi services, late-night retail establishments, and health care agencies. A list of these voluntary measures can be accessed through the main menu.

Only two states, California and Washington, have OSHA plans that enforce regulations requiring comprehensive safety programs in all workplaces that address preventing assaults on workers. These states have also enacted specific legislation to protect health care workers. Such as nurses.

Washington, along with Virginia and Florida, has passed state laws aimed at preventing robbery-related homicides in late-night retail establishments - such as convenience stores.

Local ordinances to protect taxicab drivers from violence can be found in major cities including Los Angeles, Chicago, New York, Boston, Albany, and Baltimore

It's important to note that while the potential to reduce workplace violence is great there is no conclusive scientific information on which specific approaches are most effective. Research is in progress to determine which interventions are most appropriate for different work environments. Violence is a serious workplace hazard that demands focused attention.

Because we have a diverse economy, with all kinds of jobs there will never be a single violence prevention strategy that will work in every setting. But by examining the specific situations and activities that put people at risk, employers and workers can together begin to develop a comprehensive violence prevention program. The goal of any such program should be to implement a system of controls that addresses the unique needs of the workplace.